CHAPTER VI

AET, MUSIC, STAGE

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IT was long believed that the Jewish share in the visual arts was negligible, until modern times, owing to the excessively rigorous interpretation of the third commandment. One of the most sensational of recent archaeological discoveries has made it necessary to revise this view. At Dura Europos, formerly a frontier city on the borders of the Koman and Persian Empires, there have been discovered the remains of a third-century synagogue, in a remarkable state of preservation. The walls still stand to a height in some places of nearly twenty feet. They are adorned with frescoes of amazing vitality, representing Biblical scenes, the visions of the Prophets, the Temple at Jerusalem, and so on. Contrary to all preconceived ideas, no qualms whatsoever are entertained at representing the human figure, notwithstanding the religious nature of the building. The overthrow of the Egyptians in the Red Sea, or the Dedication of Aaron, leaves nothing to fantasy: while a portrait of a Priest (probably intended to represent the Prophet Jeremiah) closely resembles the early representations of Jesus of Nazareth. These frescoes, in fact, display remarkable affinities with those discovered in the Christian catacombs and

the mosaics in the earliest Roman churches.

In view of these discoveries, some scholars go so far as to suggest that the ideas previously held with regard